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# Promoting Justice and Peace Through Islamic Education: Comparative Insights from Interfaith Engagements in Kenya and Indonesia

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## Abstract

**Objective:** This study investigates the role of Islamic values in shaping interreligious relations within pluralistic societies, focusing on Kenya and Indonesia as comparative case studies. The objective is to analyse how Islamic teachings, particularly the principles of ta'āyush (coexistence), raḥma (compassion), and 'adl (justice), inform Muslim engagement with non-Muslim communities in diverse socio-political contexts. **Theoretical framework:** The theoretical framework draws upon Qur'anic ethics and the Prophetic tradition as models for peaceful coexistence, contextualized within the broader discourse of religious pluralism and interfaith dialogue. **Literature review:** Prior studies on Islamic education and interfaith relations emphasize ethical principles like 'adl, raḥma, and ta'āyush in conflict resolution. However, few compare regional approaches. This study fills that gap by analyzing Islamic peacebuilding practices across Kenya and Indonesia within the framework of the SDGs and religious pluralism. **Method:** Methodologically, this research employs a qualitative, comparative case study approach, integrating historical analysis, textual interpretation, and contemporary field data from both countries. **Results:** Findings reveal that Islamic traditions in both Kenya and Indonesia offer rich resources for fostering social cohesion and resisting sectarianism. Kenyan Muslim initiatives emphasize grassroots reconciliation in post-conflict zones, while Indonesian Islamic movements focus on institutional interfaith collaboration and education. These responses align with global peacebuilding frameworks, contributing to the realization of Sustainable Development Goal 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions) and SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals). **Implications:** The study's implications highlight the potential of Islamic interfaith engagement to mitigate religious tensions and promote inclusive governance. **Novelty:** Its novelty lies in the cross-regional comparison of Islamic interfaith strategies and its grounding in both classical Islamic sources and contemporary global development agendas. The research offers a nuanced, actionable model for faith-based peacebuilding in multicultural contexts.

**Keywords:** interfaith dialogue, peacebuilding, religious pluralism, islamic education, sustainable development goals.

## INTRODUCTION

Islamic teachings emphasize justice, compassion, and peaceful coexistence, particularly in interactions with individuals from diverse religious backgrounds. Foundational verses in the

Qur'an, such as *"There is no compulsion in religion"* (Qur'an 2:256) and *"To you be your religion, and to me my religion"* (Qur'an 109:6) underscore the importance of free will in belief systems and mutual respect among different faith traditions. These guiding principles shape Islamic perspectives on interfaith relations and underscore the faith's commitment to dialogue and cooperation. In pluralistic societies such as Kenya and Indonesia, where Islam is a dominant faith, these principles are particularly relevant, providing a framework for peaceful coexistence and collaboration among religious communities [1]–[4].

Kenya and Indonesia represent unique contexts for studying Islamic interfaith engagement. Both countries are home to significant Muslim populations and exhibit diverse religious landscapes, making them ideal case studies for exploring how Muslims actively participate in interfaith dialogue and contribute to peacebuilding initiatives. In Kenya, where Islam coexists with Christianity, and in Indonesia, the world's most populous Muslim-majority nation with a rich religious diversity, Islam's call for justice and respect becomes crucial in fostering harmonious relations between communities. The principles of coexistence, embodied in the Qur'an, have shaped efforts in both nations to promote interfaith understanding and collaboration. These efforts align closely with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal 16 (promoting peaceful and inclusive societies) and Goal 17 (strengthening partnerships across sectors and faiths) [5]–[8].

Despite these significant advancements, challenges to interfaith relations persist, particularly in the face of Islamophobia, the rise of extremist ideologies, and the politicization of religious identity. Islamophobia, a form of prejudice against Muslims, continues to influence societal perceptions and interactions, undermining efforts for peaceful coexistence. Additionally, extremism distorts the true message of Islam, using violence to further divisive agendas, which presents a major obstacle to interfaith dialogue and peacebuilding. The politicization of religious identity, often seen in political rhetoric, further exacerbates tensions, hindering the establishment of mutual understanding and respect between different religious communities [9]–[11].

The consequences of these challenges are far-reaching, not only impacting the Muslim community but also straining relationships with other religious groups and society as a whole. In countries like Kenya and Indonesia, the ability to navigate these complex realities is vital for fostering social cohesion and interfaith collaboration. Therefore, this paper aims to evaluate the Islamic approaches to interfaith relations, considering both the successes and the ongoing challenges. By analyzing the strategies employed by Muslim communities in these nations, the paper will explore how Islamic teachings can play a constructive role in mitigating conflict, fostering understanding, and promoting inclusivity [12]–[14].

This analysis will also offer policy recommendations to enhance interfaith dialogue further and contribute to a more inclusive environment. Additionally, theological insights drawn from Islamic teachings will reinforce the faith's call for justice and peace in contemporary interfaith dynamics. Through this evaluation, the paper aims to deepen the understanding of how Islamic principles of justice, coexistence, and respect can be effectively applied to contemporary interfaith relations, making a meaningful contribution to global peacebuilding efforts [15]–[18].

This study holds significant implications for scholars, policymakers, educators, and interfaith practitioners. First, it underscores the practical relevance of Islamic ethical teachings, particularly *'adl* (justice), *rahma* (compassion), and *ta'ayush* (coexistence) as foundational principles for interreligious engagement in diverse and sometimes tense socio-political environments. By situating these values within real-world case studies in Kenya and Indonesia, the research offers evidence-based insights into how Islamic education and grassroots leadership can counteract religious extremism, promote inclusive governance, and mitigate social tensions [19].

In Kenya, the study illustrates how Muslim actors participate in post-conflict reconciliation and community-based peacebuilding, particularly in urban centers like Mombasa and Nairobi.

In Indonesia, the findings highlight the contributions of institutional Islamic actors such as Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah, which promote interfaith dialogue through educational reforms, digital outreach, and fatwas supporting tolerance. These localized responses offer valuable models for conflict-prone regions struggling with religious polarization [20], [21].

From a policy perspective, the research emphasizes the necessity of supporting Islamic educational institutions that incorporate civic values and interreligious literacy into their curricula. It also points to the strategic role of faith-based actors in achieving global peace agendas, notably Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions) and SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals). The study suggests that governments and NGOs should consider Islamic civil society as credible partners in social cohesion and development work, particularly in pluralistic nations. Moreover, the research contributes to theological discourse by demonstrating how Islamic traditions can evolve to meet contemporary interfaith challenges without compromising core religious principles. It advocates for Qur'an-based interfaith dialogue and repositions Islamic ethics as tools for constructive engagement, rather than barriers to pluralism [22].

The novelty of this study lies in its comparative and multi-layered approach. Few existing works have systematically analyzed how Islamic interfaith engagement operates across both African and Southeast Asian contexts. This cross-regional perspective allows for the identification of contextual variables such as legal systems, political landscapes, and majority-minority dynamics that influence Islamic approaches to peacebuilding. The study is also innovative in its integration of classical Islamic sources with contemporary global development frameworks, particularly the SDGs. By doing so, it bridges the gap between faith-based traditions and international policy discourse, offering a holistic framework for understanding how religion can be a driver of sustainable peace. Furthermore, the inclusion of digital interfaith activism, such as moderated fatwas and youth-led media programs, demonstrates a forward-looking approach that reflects the evolving nature of religious engagement in the 21st century [23].

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Islamic scholars have a long tradition of engaging with interfaith themes, advocating for coexistence, mutual respect, and social responsibility. Classical scholars such as Al-Ghazālī and Ibn Taymiyya emphasized the importance of maintaining peaceful relations with non-Muslims. In modern times, Fethullah Gülen has offered an interpretation that promotes mutual respect and dialogue among different faiths. Contemporary African Muslim scholars like Prof. Ali Mazrui and Abdullahi An-Na'im emphasize the role of Islamic values in fostering pluralism and nation-building. They argue that the core principles of Islam can contribute to unity and peace within diverse societies [24]–[27].

Meanwhile, in Southeast Asia, scholars like Azyumardi Azra and Nurcholish Madjid (Cak Nur) have championed the concept of Islamic pluralism (*tasāmuh*) and a civic interpretation of Sharia, advocating for a society where diverse religious practices can coexist harmoniously. Key concepts that emerge from the literature include coexistence (*ta'āyush*), mutual respect, Islamic pluralism, civic interpretations of Sharia, and social responsibility. All of these underscore the importance of peace, harmony, and shared human dignity [28]–[32].

However, several gaps remain in the existing literature. For instance, there is a limited focus on contemporary African contexts in interfaith dialogue, as evidenced by studies such as those by Guleid (2020) and Nyang (2004), which document Islamic peacebuilding efforts in Kenya. Additionally, the literature often overlooks how exclusivist ideologies within certain interpretations of Islam can hinder interfaith cooperation, as well as the impact of state policies on promoting or obstructing religious dialogue [33]–[38].

**Table 1. Literature Review**

Author(s)	Region/Country	Key Themes/Concepts	Focus Area	Contribution
Al-Ghazālī, Ibn Taymiyya	Classical Islamic Scholars	Coexistence, mutual respect, and social responsibility	Theological basis for peaceful coexistence with non-Muslims	Emphasizes the Islamic foundation for interfaith dialogue and cooperation
Fethullah Gülen	Modern Islamic Scholar	Mutual respect, interfaith dialogue, and social harmony	Modern interpretations of Islam and interfaith cooperation	Advocates for Islamic values of respect, dialogue, and community building
Ali Mazrui, Abdullahi An-Na'im	Africa (Kenya)	Nation-building, pluralism, Islamic ethics	The role of Islamic values in shaping pluralistic societies	Promotes the integration of Islamic ethics in national unity and peacebuilding in pluralistic societies
Azyumardi Azra, Nurcholish Madjid	Southeast Asia (Indonesia)	Islamic pluralism (tasāmuh), civic interpretation of Sharia	Role of Islam in nation-building and religious pluralism	Promotes Islamic pluralism and civic Sharia as a means of fostering interfaith harmony
Guleid and Nyang	Kenya	Islamic peacebuilding, interfaith dialogue, Christian and traditional African religions	Islamic institutions' involvement in peacebuilding and interfaith relations in Kenya	Explores Islamic peacebuilding efforts and interfaith engagement in Kenya
Hefner (2020), Azra (2013)	Indonesia	Islamic identity, national unity, Pancasila, interfaith relations	Role of Islam in national unity and integration of different faith communities under Pancasila	Explores the fusion of Islamic identity with national unity and religious pluralism in Indonesia

## METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative research approach, combining a literature review, case studies, and semi-structured interviews to explore interreligious relations in Kenya and Indonesia from an Islamic perspective. The literature review synthesises existing academic and theological works on Islamic teachings related to coexistence, compassion, justice, and peacebuilding. Case studies from both countries provide context-specific insights into the role of Islamic institutions, such as mosques, schools, and community organisations, in promoting interfaith dialogue and fostering peaceful coexistence. Additionally, semi-structured interviews with religious leaders, scholars, and practitioners offer firsthand perspectives on the practical application of Islamic principles in peacebuilding efforts [39]–[41].

The analysis focuses on identifying key themes, including the influence of Islamic ethics, particularly the concepts of *ta'āyush* (coexistence), *rahma* (compassion), and *'adl* (justice) in shaping interfaith relations. It also explores the role of Islamic institutions and community leaders in countering extremism and promoting harmony within religiously diverse societies. The findings aim to offer a comprehensive understanding of how Islamic teachings inform and influence interfaith engagement and peacebuilding practices in Kenya and Indonesia [42]–[45].

**Table 2. Summarizing The Research Method**

Research Method	Description
Literature Review	A comprehensive review of existing academic and theological works to explore Islamic teachings on coexistence, peacebuilding, and interfaith relations. This provides a theoretical foundation for the study.
Case Studies	In-depth case studies of Kenya and Indonesia to examine the practical application of Islamic principles in fostering interreligious dialogue and peacebuilding in diverse contexts.
Semi-structured Interviews	Interviews with religious leaders, scholars, and practitioners in Kenya and Indonesia to gather firsthand insights into the role of Islamic institutions in interfaith relations and peacebuilding.
Data Analysis	Thematic analysis to identify key themes, such as the impact of Islamic ethics on promoting harmony, countering extremism, and fostering social cohesion in pluralistic societies.
Comparative Approach	Comparison of interfaith strategies in Kenya and Indonesia, identifying unique practices and challenges that shape Islamic interfaith engagement in different cultural and political contexts.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Islamic Bridging Factors in Interreligious Relations

#### Qur'anic Ethics and Prophetic Precedents

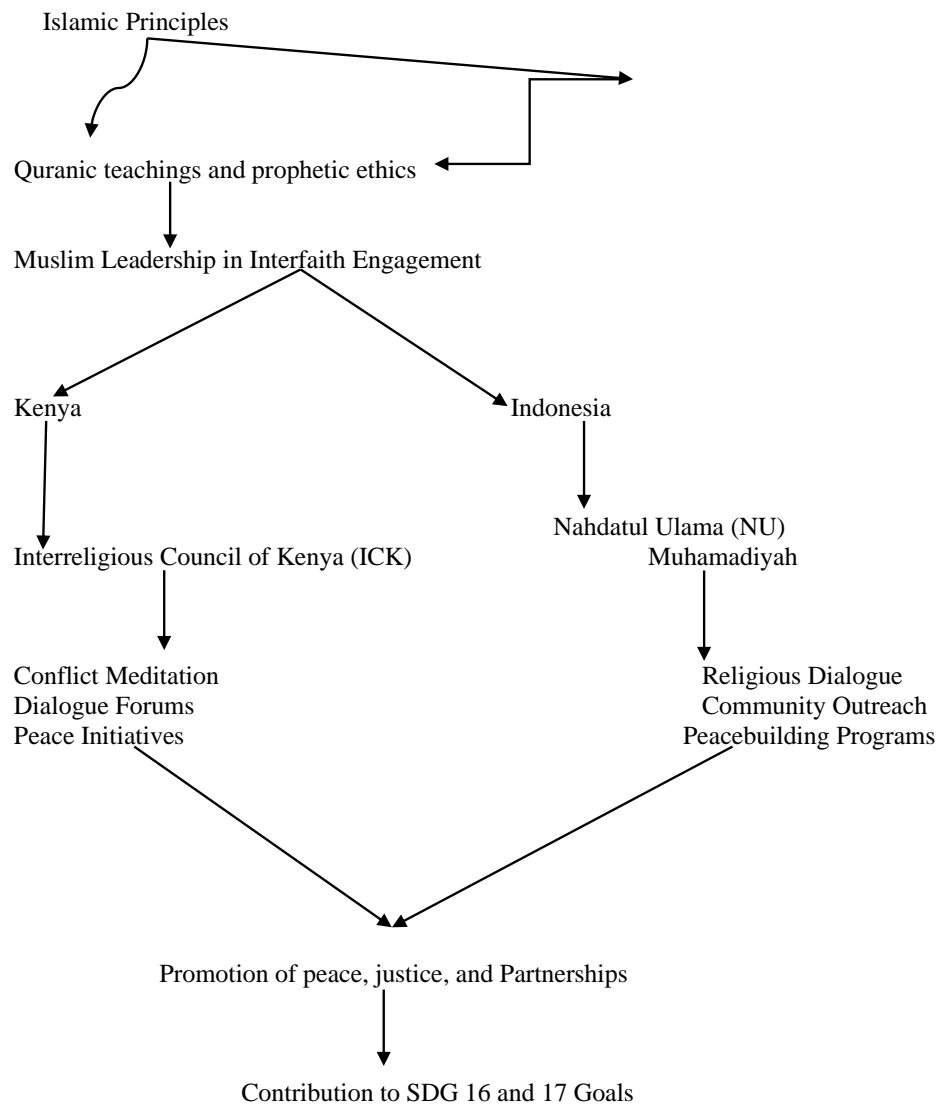
The life and teachings of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) provide significant insights into the foundations of interreligious relations within an Islamic framework. His interactions with various religious communities, Jews, Christians, and polytheists were characterized by a commitment to peaceful coexistence and mutual respect. The Constitution of Medina, which established a multi-religious society, served as a pioneering model for governance that upheld the rights of all citizens, regardless of their religious affiliations. Key Qur'anic principles, such as the command to "speak kindly to people" (Qur'an 2:83) and the call to "cooperate in righteousness" (Qur'an 5:2), highlight essential ethical standards that guide Muslims in their relationships with others. These teachings encourage dialogue, respect, and collaboration, promoting a society where diverse beliefs can coexist harmoniously [46]–[48].

#### Muslim-Led Interfaith Forums and Councils

In Kenya, the involvement of Muslim leaders in the Inter-Religious Council of Kenya (IRCK) illustrates the proactive role that the Muslim community plays in facilitating interfaith dialogue and conflict resolution [49]–[53].

These leaders often draw upon Islamic ethics to mediate disputes among various religious groups, thereby fostering understanding and collaboration. Similarly, in Indonesia, the two largest Muslim organizations, Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah, have been instrumental in promoting interreligious engagement through various initiatives, including religious

dialogue and community outreach programs. Their efforts not only reinforce the importance of mutual respect but also aim to build bridges of understanding among different faith traditions [54]–[57].



**Figure 1. Muslim-Led Interfaith Engagement in Kenya and Indonesia**

### **Zakat and Humanitarian Cooperation**

Islamic charitable organizations, particularly zakat boards and waqf institutions, engage significantly in humanitarian work alongside non-Muslim entities in areas such as health care, education, and disaster relief efforts. This collaboration reflects a fundamental aspect of the Islamic worldview, which mandates that serving humanity (*khidmah lil-nās*) transcends sectarian lines. By pooling resources and expertise, these initiatives address pressing social issues and demonstrate a commitment to the well-being of all people, regardless of their faith. The shared goal of alleviating suffering and promoting welfare reinforces the shared values inherent in both Islamic teachings and broader humanitarian principles [58]–[61].

### **Madrasa and Islamic Education Reforms**

In both Kenya and Indonesia, there is a notable transformation occurring within Islamic educational institutions (*madāris*). These schools are increasingly incorporating civic education, ethical training, and interfaith understanding into their curricula. Such reforms aim

not only to provide students with a robust foundation in Islamic knowledge but also to cultivate a generation of Muslims who are knowledgeable about and respectful toward religious plurality. By integrating these contemporary educational practices, madāris play a crucial role in preparing young Muslims to engage constructively in diverse societies, fostering an environment of cooperation and mutual respect among different faith communities [62]–[64].

### Social Cohesion in Urban Muslim Communities

In urban centers like Mombasa and Jakarta, various Muslim-led initiatives address pressing social issues such as environmental justice, economic inequality, and youth engagement. These programs often involve collaborative efforts with non-Muslim organizations and communities, reflecting Islam's vision of *maslahah* (public welfare) that prioritizes the common good. By working together across religious lines, these initiatives not only tackle immediate challenges but also strengthen social bonds and promote a sense of community. This collaborative spirit exemplifies the potential for interfaith partnerships to create a more just and equitable society, resonating strongly with the broader principles of compassion and cooperation espoused in Islamic teachings [65]–[67].

### Persisting Challenges in Interreligious Relations

#### Misinterpretation of Jihād and Da‘wah

Extremist factions manipulate Islamic concepts like *jihād* and *da‘wah* to justify hostility. These distortions contradict the broader Islamic tradition of peaceful outreach and just resistance.

#### Islamophobia and the Marginalization of Muslims

In Kenya, post-terror attacks have fueled suspicion toward Muslims. In Indonesia, Muslims who advocate for pluralism have sometimes been accused of diluting the faith. Islamophobia undermines genuine Islamic engagement with other faiths.

#### Political Manipulation of Religion

Politicians in both countries occasionally exploit Islamic rhetoric to divide communities. This manipulation damages Islam's image and hampers interfaith cooperation, which should be based on sincerity and *ihsān* (excellence).

#### Inequities in Religious Representation

Despite their numbers, Muslims in both countries often experience underrepresentation in national media and interfaith policy boards. This is especially evident in Christian-dominated sectors in Kenya and non-Muslim majority provinces in Indonesia.

**Table 3. Case Studies on Interreligious Relations in Kenya and Indonesia**

Country	Location	Interfaith Initiatives	Key Outcomes/Impact
Kenya	Mombasa & Nairobi	– Muslim scholars working with Christian clergy for peaceful elections - Collaboration for interfaith peacebuilding	– Promoted peaceful election processes - Reduced political and religious tensions
Indonesia	Yogyakarta & Aceh	– Arts-based peace projects (Yogyakarta) - Islamic law recalibration to be inclusive (Aceh)	– Strengthened community ties through art - Promoted justice and inclusivity in Sharia application

**Table 4. Recommendations for Improving Interfaith Relations**

Recommendation	Action Item	Expected Outcome
Promote Authentic Islamic Narratives	Develop media content showcasing Islamic tolerance (sermons, TV programs, podcasts)	– Counter misconceptions, foster understanding
Support Female & Youth Muslim Leaders	Empower youth and women as peacebuilders in interfaith initiatives	– Inclusive leadership, bringing fresh perspectives
Facilitate Qur'an-Based Dialogues	Host interfaith theological dialogues focusing on shared Abrahamic values	– Build mutual respect through shared ethics
Establish Islamic Chairs for Interreligious Studies	Position scholars to research Islamic principles of peaceful coexistence	– Academic contributions to interfaith understanding
Counter Online Radicalism with Islamic Ethics	Create digital content promoting mercy and compassion from the Sunnah and Qur'an.	– Combat online extremism with ethical Islamic narratives.

**Table 5. Comparison Table – Kenya vs. Indonesia Religious Landscape**

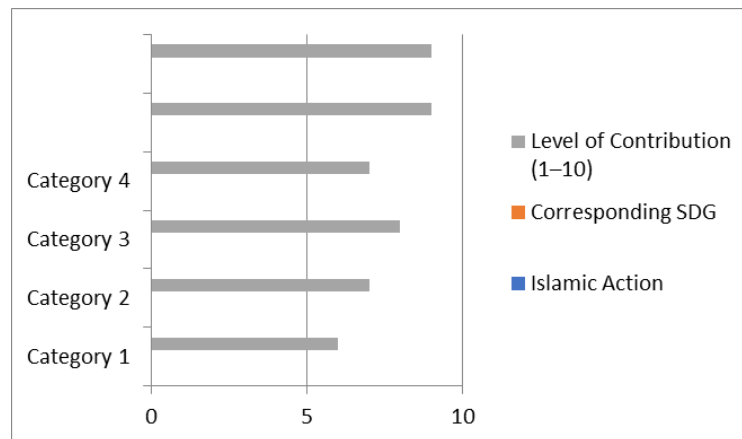
Aspect	Kenya	Indonesia
Muslim Population	~11% (minority)	~87% (majority)
Legal Framework	Secular (Christian-dominated)	Pancasila (inclusive pluralism)
Extremism Source	Al-Shabaab (external influence)	Homegrown (JAD, radical pesantren)
Key Islamic Actors	SUPKEM, Jamia Mosque	NU, Muhammadiyah, GusDurian
Interfaith Mechanisms	Local mosque-based forums	Madrasah tolerance, fatwas of peace

### Advancing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) through Islamic Interfaith Engagement

Islamic teachings that emphasize *‘adl* (justice), *rahma* (compassion), and *ta ‘āyush* (peaceful coexistence) align closely with the vision of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In both Kenya and Indonesia, Muslim-led interfaith activities not only foster harmony but also tangibly contribute to multiple SDG targets. These include:

1. SDG 16 – Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions: Through Qur’anic-guided peacebuilding, conflict resolution, and justice-oriented leadership, Muslim communities help to build inclusive societies free from violence and extremism.
2. SDG 17 – Partnerships for the Goals: Interreligious councils, community coalitions, and humanitarian alliances embody multi-stakeholder partnerships based on mutual respect.
3. SDG 4 – Quality Education: Islamic schools and *madāris* are reforming curricula to promote tolerance, civic values, and interfaith literacy.
4. SDG 1 & 3 – No Poverty and Good Health: Zakat institutions collaborate with other religious and civil society actors in poverty alleviation, health outreach, and disaster relief.
5. SDG 10 – Reduced Inequalities: Muslim engagement in minority or marginalized communities reflects Islamic values of equity, fighting systemic discrimination and Islamophobia.

By rooting their interfaith actions in both Islamic theology and global development frameworks, Kenyan and Indonesian Muslim leaders are creating faith-based pathways to achieving Agenda 2030. This demonstrates how religion can be a driver of sustainable development, not merely a cultural identity marker.



**Figure 2. Level of Impact of Islamic Interfaith Activities on Selected SDGs**

### Digital Engagement & Moderated Fatwas

In both Kenya and Indonesia, Islamic councils and NGOs increasingly leverage digital platforms to communicate inclusive interpretations of Islam and promote interreligious understanding. For instance:

1. The Indonesian Council of Ulama (MUI) in East Java issued a fatwa on *dakwah* ethics emphasizing anti-radicalism, tolerance, adherence to constitutional norms, and accommodation of local wisdom, specifically in digital media contexts, countering online extremism and fostering religious moderation.
2. A qualitative study on MUI's social media usage in Mandailing Natal District shows active efforts to build religious awareness and community solidarity through Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok, illustrating engagement with pluralist values via digital outreach.
3. Additionally, youth-led interfaith dialogue programs on YouTube—such as Deddy Corbuzier's #LoginCloseTheDoor series—have proved effective in introducing religious concepts and bolstering public acceptance of interfaith discourse.
4. These digital initiatives align with SDG 16 and SDG 17, as they:
5. Promote peaceful discourse online and combat radical narratives.
6. Strengthen partnerships across religious and generational lines via digital media.
7. Engage youth in building inclusive and respectful interfaith communities.

This modern, tech-savvy approach helps scale the impact of interreligious cooperation and nurtures a generation comfortable with pluralism and civic dialogue in both Kenya and Indonesia. This study explores how Islamic teachings—centered on *‘adl* (justice), *rahma* (compassion), and *ta‘āyush* (coexistence)—can promote interfaith peace in pluralistic societies. Using comparative case studies in Kenya and Indonesia, it examines how Muslim communities engage in dialogue, education, and humanitarian initiatives aligned with the SDGs. While Indonesia emphasizes institutional collaboration, Kenya showcases grassroots reconciliation efforts. The research highlights both promise and persistent challenges, such as Islamophobia, extremism, and political misuse of religion. Its novelty lies in bridging Islamic ethics with global development goals, offering a practical and theological model for faith-based peacebuilding in diverse, multicultural contexts.

## CONCLUSION

Interfaith relations and peacebuilding are vital components of creating harmonious and just societies, especially in contexts marked by religious diversity. Islamic teachings, deeply embedded in principles of justice, compassion, and coexistence, offer profound guidance for fostering peaceful coexistence between different faith communities. From the historical precedents set by the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) to contemporary efforts in countries like Kenya and Indonesia, Islam provides a comprehensive framework for overcoming religious divisions and promoting unity. However, challenges such as the misinterpretation of Islamic principles, political exploitation, and societal biases continue to complicate these efforts. This study has highlighted how Islamic ethics, inclusive policies, and educational initiatives can be utilized to address these obstacles, promoting a global role for Muslims as advocates for peace and justice. These efforts are not only aligned with the objectives of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) such as SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions) and SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals), but also support broader aims such as SDG 4 (Quality Education) and SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities). Thus, Islamic interfaith engagement holds the potential to significantly contribute to global peace and sustainable development by 2030. As this analysis shows, while meaningful strides have been made, much remains to be done. There is a pressing need for further research to explore how Islamic interfaith models can be applied in various global contexts, examining both successes and challenges in different regions. Future studies should also investigate the role of emerging technologies in fostering interfaith dialogue and combating religious extremism. The call to action is clear: Muslims must continue to lead efforts in promoting peaceful coexistence, not only as a religious obligation but as an essential contribution to global peace and sustainability.

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## Author Contribution

Alwy Ahmed Mohamed contributed to the field research in Kenya and initial manuscript drafting. Muhammad K. Ridwan conducted the comparative analysis with Indonesian data and finalized the theoretical framework. Both authors collaborated equally in interpreting the findings and revising the manuscript for academic clarity and consistency.

## Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this article. No financial or personal relationships influenced the study's design, data interpretation, or conclusions. All research was conducted with academic independence and ethical integrity.

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